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**UYGHURS IN XINJIANG: UNITED OR DIVIDED  
AGAINST THE PRC?**

by

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September 2012

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to answer the question of how the Chinese government's policies towards the Uyghurs, a Turkic Muslim group living predominantly in the northwestern Chinese province Xinjiang, have influenced the political consolidation of the Uyghurs. Three aspects of this question are explored: Uyghur identity, interests, and Islamic mobilization. First, have Chinese policies helped to strengthen or weaken Uyghur identity? Second, how have Chinese policies shaped Uyghur interests? Finally, is there any evidence of Islamic radicalization and mobilization of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, evaluated in the context of Marc Sageman's theory on Islamic radicalization? This thesis argues that the PRC's policies in Xinjiang have increased Uyghur solidarity socially but not politically. The Chinese policies have served to unintentionally unify the Uyghurs in opposition against a common adversary. Nevertheless, the PRC's overwhelming state capacity to repress Uyghur discontent has prevented the Uyghurs from achieving any significant form of political consolidation. Finally, there is very little evidence of Uyghur Islamic radicalization and mobilization. The situation in Xinjiang does not fit Sageman's theory on Islamic radicalization.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| CCP    | Chinese Communist Party                            |
| CSRT   | Combatant Status Review Tribunals                  |
| ETIC   | East Turkistan Information Center                  |
| ETIM   | East Turkistan Islamic Movement                    |
| ETIP   | East Turkistan Islamic Party                       |
| NGO    | Non-governmental organization                      |
| PLA    | People's Liberation Army                           |
| PSB    | Public Security Bureau                             |
| PRC    | People's Republic of China                         |
| RMB    | Renminbi (Chinese currency)                        |
| SCO    | Shanghai Cooperation Organization                  |
| UAA    | Uyghur American Association                        |
| USCIRF | U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom |
| VOA    | Voice of America                                   |
| WUC    | World Uyghur Congress                              |
| XPCC   | Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps         |
| XUAR   | Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region                  |

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

Since the late 1980s, international attention to the Turkic Muslim group known as the Uyghurs has increased. Interest in Uyghurs has expanded primarily for two reasons—reports of alleged human rights abuses against Uyghurs by the Chinese government, and acts of violence and alleged terrorism by Uyghurs against the Chinese government and Han citizens. The last decade has witnessed a significant increase of Hans in the region of Xinjiang in the northwestern part of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and ethnic tensions have intensified as a direct result of this increase. It is estimated that in the period of 1990 to 2000, between one to two million Han migrants moved into the region, contributing to the total 7.49 million Hans living in Xinjiang (40.6 percent) in 2000.<sup>1</sup> The Han population growth rate between 1990 and 2000 was 31.6 percent—twice that of the ethnic population.<sup>2</sup> Uyghurs argue that the changing demographics reveal the deliberate sinicization of Xinjiang by Chinese authorities.

The contentious relationship between the Uyghurs and the Chinese government has been the focus of many works. The purpose of this thesis, however, is to answer the question of how the Chinese government’s policies toward the Uyghurs in Xinjiang have influenced the political consolidation of the Uyghurs. Have the policies served to unintentionally unify the Uyghurs in opposition against a common adversary, or have they served to divide and fractionalize the population? In examining the responses of Uyghurs to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule in Xinjiang, this thesis asks whether or not the policies have increased or decreased Uyghur political consolidation.

Three inter-related aspects of political consolidation are examined: Uyghur identity, interests, and Islamic mobilization. First, have Chinese policies helped to strengthen or weaken Uyghur identity? Are the policies working to integrate Uyghurs into the greater Han society or have they served to further alienate the group? Second,

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1 Nicolas Bœcquelin, “Staged Development in Xinjiang,” *The China Quarterly* 178 (2004): 369.

2 Bœcquelin, “Staged Development,” 369.

how have Chinese policies shaped Uyghur interests? Do the policies give Uyghurs the tangible conditions to unite together and focus on common grievances? Finally, are there any evidences of Islamic radicalization and mobilization of Uyghurs in Xinjiang? Has the repressiveness of Chinese policies toward Uyghurs in any way influenced Uyghurs to seek terrorism as a response? This thesis attempts to answer all these questions on Uyghur political consolidation.

## **B. IMPORTANCE**

The Chinese government holds the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) to be of significant importance for economic, political, and security reasons. Xinjiang is China's largest province, has the highest per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of any province outside the eastern provinces, and holds the country's principal oil reserves.<sup>3</sup> In addition to oil, it also holds significant amounts of natural gas, gold, and uranium.<sup>4</sup> Xinjiang also serves as an important economic passageway between China and Central Asia. An oil pipeline between China and Kazakhstan supplies oil to the energy hungry state, part of Beijing's plan to increase oil imports from Central Asia and decrease dependence on Middle Eastern oil.<sup>5</sup>

The significant Uyghur population in the region poses one of the greatest challenges to the CCP's goal of integrating Xinjiang into the rest of the country. The Uyghurs' discontent with Chinese rule brings the potential for escalating ethnic conflict and instability in the region. The government has attempted to manage the Uyghur problem through hard and soft tactics, but has, for the most part, treated any sign of dissatisfaction with the CCP as potentially destabilizing and therefore unacceptable. Politically, Uyghur aspirations for autonomy or independence not only challenge the legitimacy of the regime, but also increase the risks of exacerbating other territorial sovereignty issues in Tibet and Taiwan.

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<sup>3</sup> S. Fredrick Starr, introduction to *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Fredrick Starr (New York: Central Asia-Caucus Institute, 2004), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 11.

<sup>5</sup> "China-Kazakhstan Pipeline Starts to Pump Oil," *Xinhua News*, December 15, 2005, accessed March 15, 2012, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-12/15/content\\_503709.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2005-12/15/content_503709.htm).

As for security concerns, Xinjiang is bordered by eight countries—Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. A serious ethnic conflict could send a significant influx of refugees into neighboring countries, destabilizing bilateral relations. There is also concern for increased terrorist activities stemming from Uyghur dissent. The Chinese government has blamed numerous violent acts in Xinjiang on “terrorists” operating in and out of the state. Terrorism is an obvious security issue in and of itself, but radical Islamic mobilization may also upset regional stability because of potential terrorist links to Central Asian neighbors.

Assessing how the Chinese government’s policies have affected the Uyghur political consolidation is important because it can help us predict (1) the likelihood of the Uyghurs to have their grievances addressed by the government, (2) the likelihood of the Uyghur culture surviving under current PRC policies, and (3) the likelihood of Uyghur Islamic radicalization and mobilization. The answer could reveal whether or not the government’s policies are working to integrate Xinjiang fully into the state, or working to effectively integrate the Uyghur population, or to effectively marginalize the Uyghur population with a significant demographic shift supported by Beijing’s hard power in the region.

Each path is distinct, with a significant range of consequences. If the policies have served to unify the Uyghurs, then political consolidation might be more effective in challenging the Chinese government and bringing about eventual change and ethnic stability for all sides. However, increased political cohesiveness might also force the Chinese government to crack down even harder on the Uyghur population due to the high value the CCP has placed on integrating Xinjiang. If Uyghurs have united through Islamic radicalization, then it can be expected that violence and further alienation will occur. Alternately, if Chinese policies divide the Uyghurs (whether intentionally or not), the PRC will may successfully integrate Xinjiang by dividing and suppressing the Uyghur people in perpetuity.

## **C. PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESES**

This thesis addresses the impact of Chinese policies on Uyghur political consolidation. The combination of both Xinjiang's importance to the Chinese government and the sizeable presence of an ethnic-minority group dissatisfied with Han Chinese rule make this a problem that will not go away easily.

This thesis argues that Chinese policies have, in one way, increased the unity of the Uyghurs in direct response to the repression of Chinese rule. Unfavorable state policies have united the Uyghurs against a common adversary. The core of Chinese policies has been to change the Uyghurs (or in the government's term, to "develop" them). Uyghurs have responded in stressing even more so their distinction from the Han Chinese people and culture. However, despite this improved sense of belonging to a greater Uyghur community, actual steps toward significant political consolidation are still lacking due to tremendous challenges imposed by the Chinese government. After the series of demonstrations, protests, and riots in the 1990s, attempts toward political consolidation have been effectively squashed by the repressiveness of the Chinese regime. The PRC's state capacity is overwhelmingly superior to that of the Uyghur population.

## **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Literature on Chinese Policies toward Uyghurs in Xinjiang**

The Chinese government's policies toward the Uyghurs in Xinjiang can be broken down into two unofficial broad categories. The first consists of policies that are focused on the assimilation and development of the perceived "backwardness" of the Uyghur people. The second category of policies can be considered the "hard" policies and many fall under the so-called "Strike Hard, Maximize Pressure" campaign launched by the Chinese government in 1996. Chapter III examines these Chinese policies in greater details.

The majority of the literature on the Chinese government's policies toward the Uyghurs finds the policies repressive and in blatant violation of basic human rights, especially in regard to the Strike Hard campaign and crackdowns on Uyghur

demonstrations. Much of this literature comes from researchers who have conducted fieldwork in Xinjiang, such as James Millward, Dru Gladney, Gardner Bovingdon, and Justin Rudelson. Additionally, reports from Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and testimonials from Uyghur expatriates provided by transnational Uyghur organizations, also contribute to this field.

Assimilation policies such as restricting the use of Uyghur and controlling education are viewed negatively by NGOs and Uyghur transnational organizations. In the early 2000s, the Chinese government changed its previous policy of a bilingual educational system and mandated Mandarin study be incorporated in all primary level education.<sup>6</sup> The primary concern with this policy shift is the loss of Uyghur authority to determine the language of instruction for their children, a right established in the PRC's Constitution and the PRC's Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law.<sup>7</sup> Some Uyghurs apprehensively view the language and education policy changes as a direct challenge to the safeguarding of Uyghur culture and identity.<sup>8</sup> According to the Uyghur Human Rights Project of the diaspora group Uyghur American Association (UAA), the PRC language policy is like a "new Cultural Revolution for the Uyghurs" in which the Chinese government is "in the process of destroying the language."<sup>9</sup> It is important to note, however, that many urban Uyghurs, particularly intellectuals, tend to advocate that Uyghurs master the Mandarin language, arguing that only through the Mandarin language and secular education will the Uyghurs become better equipped to compete against the Hans.<sup>10</sup>

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6 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 104.

7 Congressional Executive Commission on China, "The People's Republic of China Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law," accessed March 13, 2012, <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.php?showsingl=9507>.

8 Linda Benson, "Education and Social Mobility among Minority Populations in Xinjiang," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Fredrick Starr (New York: Central Asia-Caucus Institute, 2004), 198.

9 Uyghur Human Rights Project, "Uyghur Language Under Attack: The Myth of 'Bilingual' Education in the People's Republic of China," accessed March 13, 2012, <http://docs.uyghuramerican.org/UyghurLanguageUnderAttack.pdf>.

10 Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak. "Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Fredrick Starr (New York: Central Asia-Caucus Institute, 2004), 310.

Also contentious is the content of the classroom curriculum, particularly the subject of Xinjiang’s history. For example, in the 1990s, minority students were required to study and pass an examination on the Chinese government’s official version of Xinjiang’s history. The PRC-approved version states that Xinjiang has been an integral part of China for the past two thousand years—a version of history that many Uyghurs do not agree with.

The majority of the literature in this field also argues that economic development in the region has benefited Han migrants at the expense of the Uyghurs and other indigenous minorities (e.g. Kazakh, Tajik, and Uzbek). Although the average standard of living has increased for most in the region, this growth is unequal. Millward documents that higher-paying skilled and government positions are held disproportionately by Han Chinese.<sup>11</sup> Becquelin argues that in southern Xinjiang, where the region is overwhelmingly non-Han, the average per capita income is half of that of Xinjiang as a whole.<sup>12</sup> The influx of Han migrants has also been blamed for the lack of jobs for Uyghurs. Millward provides evidence of Han construction site employers hiring Han migrants over locals due to the cultural gap and the lack of effort to bridge that gap.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, most state funding for the “Develop the West” campaign is dedicated to building infrastructure related to “communications, transportation, large-scale industry, and energy development.”<sup>14</sup> The impression of many Uyghurs is that they are “shut out” of these new jobs, especially in the energy sector.<sup>15</sup>

In the post-September 11 world, and in the context of the U.S.-led “war against terrorism,” many argue that actions taken against dissident Uyghurs can now easily fall under the pretext of actions against terrorists. In 2009, the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee published its hearing on the nature of Uyghur nationalism and questioned the validity of the PRC’s 2003 list of wanted “terrorists.” The report points out that “human

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<sup>11</sup> James Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 305.

<sup>12</sup> Becquelin, “Staged Development,” 372.

<sup>13</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 305.

<sup>14</sup> Starr, *Xinjiang*, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 305.

rights and Uyghur groups have warned that, after the 9/11 attacks, the PRC shifted to use the international counterterrorism campaign to justify the PRC's long-term cultural, religious, and political repression of Uyghurs both in and outside of China.”<sup>16</sup> Gladney argues that “China makes little distinction between separatists, terrorists, and civil rights activists” and that it is important to note that “one person’s terrorist may be another’s freedom fighter.”<sup>17</sup> In a 2002 article in the *Washington Post*, Liu Yaohua, vice director of the Xinjiang Public Security Bureau (PSB), was reported to have said, “Any Uyghur who advocated independence for Xinjiang was probably a terrorist.”<sup>18</sup> Bovingdon argues that “government officials in Beijing and Ürümqi have, with very few exceptions, shown no tolerance for open protests by Uyghurs, whatever the motivation” and that “no matter what the issue, Uyghurs do not have a right to express their discontent openly.”<sup>19</sup> He assesses that between 1980 and 1997, there have been only four concessions made on issues that had taken the people to the streets in demonstration. In all other cases, instead of addressing Uyghur grievances, the government has responded to protestors’ demands “with either stony silence or even more restrictive policies.”<sup>20</sup>

As stated earlier, the majority of the literature on the PRC’s policies toward the Uyghurs holds that these policies have been unfavorable to the Uyghurs. The main challenger of this common viewpoint is, not surprisingly, the Chinese government. The government argues that its policies do benefit the minorities in Xinjiang (and elsewhere in the PRC)—both socially and economically. If one takes a cursory look at the state’s official Xinjiang news, one will find a large number of reports on improvements in the quality of life for the people, to include increases in incomes and the significant amount of capital the state is investing to build roads and other infrastructure in the region.

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16 “Exploring the Nature of Uighur Nationalism: Freedom Fighters or Terrorists?” House Foreign Affairs Committee accessed on March 7, 2012, <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/111/kan061609.pdf>.

17 Dru Gladney, “Responses to Chinese Rule: Cooperation and Opposition,” in *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Fredrick Starr (New York: Central Asia-Caucus Institute, 2004), 375.

18 Philip Pan, “In China’s West, Ethnic Strife Becomes ‘Terrorism’,” *Washington Post*, 15 July 2002, sec. A12, quoted in Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 131.

19 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 131.

20 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 128,129.

In regard to education policies, the government points to the increase in literacy in Chinese and state efforts to provide greater educational opportunities for Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities. In its 2003 white paper, the PRC asserts that “huge amounts of funds” have been expended to improve the “extremely backward situation in education among the ethnic minorities.”<sup>21</sup> The document goes on to state that by the end of 2001, “the enrollment rate of school-age children had reached 97.41% for primary schools and 82.02% for junior middle schools.”<sup>22</sup> Affirmative action policies grant lower minimum university admission scores for Uyghurs who graduate from Uyghur-language schools.<sup>23</sup>

The government argues that the push for Mandarin fluency is for the sake of the Uyghurs. That is, Mandarin fluency would allow the Uyghurs to compete more effectively in the modern world. Xinjiang Party Secretary Wang Lequan stated in 2002 that the change in the language policy was needed because “the languages of the minority nationalities have very small capacities and do not contain many of the expressions in modern science and technology which makes education in these concepts impossible. This is out of step with the twenty-first century.”<sup>24</sup>

In regard to its hard policies against alleged separatists and terrorists, the Chinese government maintains that its actions are justified in order to maintain stability, ethnic harmony, and continued support for economic growth. In a 2002 report, Chinese officials assert that “terrorist incidents have seriously jeopardized the lives and property of people of all ethnic groups as well as social stability in China, and even threatened the security and stability of related countries and regions.”<sup>25</sup> The PRC maintains, however, that the majority of the people support the regime, and demonstrations and acts of violence are instigated only by a small group of unstable individuals.<sup>26</sup> Official reports promulgated by the PRC often times disagree with other reports from NGOs, independent news

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<sup>21</sup> “History and Development of Xinjiang,” Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China, accessed March 11, 2012, <http://www.china.org.cn/e-white/20030526/index.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> “History and Development of Xinjiang.”

<sup>23</sup> Benson, “Education and Social Mobility,” 208.

<sup>24</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 345.

<sup>25</sup> “East Turkistan Forces Cannot Get Away with Impunity,” Office of the State Council, accessed March 16, 2012, [http://english.people.com.cn/200201/21/eng20020121\\_89078.shtml](http://english.people.com.cn/200201/21/eng20020121_89078.shtml).

<sup>26</sup> Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 84.

agencies, and Uyghur transnational groups. Official numbers for the dead and injured following inter-ethnic violence are often lower in Chinese reports when compared to outside accounts.

## **2. Literature on Uyghur Political Consolidation**

The literature on the political consolidation of the Uyghurs falls into two general categories. The first is that the Uyghurs are not a politically consolidated group—they are divided in numerous ways and for various reasons face significant challenges to strengthening their political cohesion. The second viewpoint is that the Uyghurs do indeed face challenges to political consolidation but they are nonetheless achieving some measures of political unity.

Many researchers point out that the Uyghurs are not uniform in their demands. Some Uyghurs want greater autonomy for the region while others want full independence from the PRC. Some focus on rectifying human rights abuses while others desire greater economic opportunities at improving their standard of living. There has yet to be a political organization that is considered truly representative of the Uyghur people. Rudelson and Jankowiak argue that the responses of the Uyghurs are varied and divided—ranging from acculturation, to non-violent resistance, to violent opposition. As stated earlier, many urban Uyghurs are open to secular education and learning Mandarin. Rural Uyghurs, on the other hand, tend to resist assimilation. Bovingdon shares the story of a college teacher from southern Xinjiang who reported that, “because Uyghur children in the south were taught from an early age to look down on Hans and to follow their parents in calling them *Qitay* [Chinese] and *kapir* [infidel], whole classes of students in the south simply refused to study Chinese.”<sup>27</sup>

Some works examine the historical background and peoples of Xinjiang for clues to explain the challenges to Uyghur political consolidation. For example, Rudelson and Jankowiak argue that the weakness of Uyghur identity lies with the artificiality of the modern Uyghur identity that we understand today. They assert that a large part of the

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27 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 89.

Uyghur identity was developed in direct response to the Chinese rule of the region.<sup>28</sup> The term “Uyghur” has been used to describe different peoples throughout history—from a Turkic nomadic group living in Mongolia, to a sedentary oasis group in the Turpan region of Xinjiang, to a primarily Buddhist elite living in the Turpan oasis.<sup>29</sup> Prior to the PRC’s rule, allegiances had been primarily to the family, clan, and oasis, not to a collective “Uyghur” ethnic group.<sup>30</sup> Starr points out that Xinjiang had never been one clearly defined region, with the Taklimakan Desert in the middle creating a significant separation between the northern and southern parts of Xinjiang.<sup>31</sup> As a result, “each of Xinjiang’s major oases constituted a kind of microculture, self-governing on a day-to-day basis and with its own distinctive economic and social features.”<sup>32</sup> Rudelson and Jankowiak argue that this distinction still exists, despite the fact that the majority of Uyghurs see themselves as sharing the same roots and a common history. The diversity of these indigenous people, now all under the label of “Uyghur,” cannot be ignored. The region’s place in history as part of the Silk Road has brought with it a colorful array of cultures from all over the world – India, Europe, the Middle East, and China. Rudelson and Jankowiak argue that it is this weakness in the Uyghur identity that has produced such varied responses to Chinese policies in Xinjiang. It is because of this weakness that the Uyghurs face such hurdles to achieving significant political consolidation.

Overall, Bovingdon provides a slightly more positive scholarly analysis on Uyghur political consolidation. He points out that while overt collection action has decreased significantly since 2001 with harsh government crackdowns, there still exists a quieter form of resistance he calls “everyday resistance.” This everyday resistance includes “grumbling, songs, jokes, satire, and political fantasy”—forms of resistance that may not make headlines but still serve an important political function.<sup>33</sup> Bovingdon

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28 Rudelson and Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance,” 351.

29 Rudelson and Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance,” 302.

30 Rudelson and Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance,” 303.

31 Starr, *Xinjiang*, 10.

32 Starr, *Xinjiang*, 12.

33 Gardner Bovingdon, “The Not-So-Silent Majority: Uighur Resistance to Han Rule in Xinjiang,” *Modern China* 28 (2002): 47.

argues that this type of resistance can “strengthen Uyghurs’ collective identity and resolve to remain distinct from the ‘Chinese nation’.”<sup>34</sup> There is strong evidence on this resolve to preserve cultural distinction. The number of intermarriages between Uyghurs and Hans is so low that it is “virtually nonexistent.”<sup>35</sup> A footnote in Millward’s work provides an interesting anecdote to this point. The wedding of two modern and educated Uyghurs who both worked for the Chinese government did not include a single Han invitee out of the 150 invited guests.<sup>36</sup> Bovingdon concludes that everyday resistance “do not just substitute for politics—they are politics.”<sup>37</sup>

Most Uyghur transnational organizations portray an encouraging perspective on Uyghur political consolidation, often times presenting the Uyghur people as a solid and cohesive group. For example, the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) states in their website that “records show that the Uyghurs have a history of more than 4000 years in East Turkestan” and “despite all the brutal and destructive campaigns by the Chinese government against their identity and existence, the Uyghurs and other indigenous people of East Turkestan refuse to be subjugated by China and are carrying on resistance torch, handed down to them by their ancestors, against Chinese occupation.”<sup>38</sup> Both statements imply a long and common history shared by all the people who call themselves Uyghurs. The statements also paint a picture of unity and action against a common adversary. The East Turkistan Information Center (ETIC) has on its website an even more blatant statement that, “the Turkic population of the Uyghuristan which *possesses the same blood, language, tradition and religion* were artificially divided into Uyghur, Khazak,

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<sup>34</sup> Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 86.

<sup>35</sup> Rudelson and Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance,” 311.

<sup>36</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 351.

<sup>37</sup> Bovingdon, “Not-So-Silent,” 47.

<sup>38</sup> “Brief History of East Turkestan,” World Uyghur Congress, accessed March 14, 2012, <http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?cat=132>.

Kyrgiz, Uzbek and Tatar by the Russian Red Imperialists.”<sup>39</sup> It also goes on to state, “...despite all the suffering and cultural genocide, the determination spirit of the people in Uyghuristan remains ever strong.”<sup>40</sup>

The Chinese government’s stance on Uyghur political consolidation is mixed. At one hand, as mentioned earlier, the government states that the overwhelming majority of Uyghurs are happy under the PRC rule. This is in line with the government’s attempt to paint Xinjiang as a place where “the people of all ethnic groups are united” and the region is a “scene of prosperity.”<sup>41</sup> Not only is the situation in Xinjiang “as a whole is good,” Chinese officials declare that “all the people in the country...have given wholehearted support to the Chinese government’s policies.”<sup>42</sup> On the other hand, the Chinese government often link Uyghurs to terrorism. Chinese officials assert that between 1990 and 2001, “East Turkistan” terrorist forces were responsible for over 200 terrorist incidents, 162 deaths, and over 440 injuries.<sup>43</sup> These forces, under the influence of “extremism, separatism and international terrorism,” have allegedly left many “blood-soaked chapters in the historical annals.”<sup>44</sup> Not only are these terrorists dangerous, they are also accused by the Chinese government of having close ties with international terrorists to include the “unstinting support” of Osama bin Laden while he was alive, primarily through financial and material aid and terrorist training.<sup>45</sup> A good example of such inconsistencies is in 1999 when the XUAR government chairman, Ablät Abdurişit, told reporters during an interview that “since the start of the 1990s, if you count explosions, assassinations, and other terrorist activities, it comes to a few thousand

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<sup>39</sup> “Who are the Uyghurs?” East Turkistan Information Center, accessed March 14, 2012, <http://utv.dyndns.org/english/who-are-the-uyghurs--haber,37.html>.

<sup>40</sup> “Who are the Uyghurs?”

<sup>41</sup> “Get Away with Impunity.”

<sup>42</sup> “Get Away with Impunity.”

<sup>43</sup> “Get Away with Impunity.”

<sup>44</sup> “Get Away with Impunity.”

<sup>45</sup> “Get Away with Impunity.”

incidents.”<sup>46</sup> However, he later stated in 2001 that Xinjiang was, “by no means...a place where violence and terrorist accidents take place very often.”<sup>47</sup>

### 3. Challenges with the Literature

A significant challenge to research for this thesis is the relative validity of divergent sources. The veracity of the reports can be questionable, especially in the context of China’s heavy censorship. The PRC has incentives to both downplay and exaggerate events. Portrayals of stability help to encourage investments in the region. Portrayals of unrest help to justify increase in police funding and help to garner international support for the PRC’s battle against “terrorism.”<sup>48</sup> This has often led to conflicting accounts from government officials, as an earlier example shows. For similar reasons, Uyghur transnational organizations also have the incentive to paint a very grave picture to gain international support and, in some cases, legitimize their call for independence. Even otherwise objective NGOs can produce flawed research and reports due to their dependence on testimonials by Uyghur dissidents, who can portray events in ways to favor their cause.<sup>49</sup> Of course, even balanced reports by dissidents and others present challenges because it is often impossible to confirm their accounts.

Another challenge is with the reliability of the data derived from interviews and surveys conducted by researchers in the field. In the highly repressive environment in which freedom of speech does not exist and honesty can result in severe prison sentences, interviews and surveys can only reveal so much. As Starr aptly puts it: “Strict controls arising from acute political sensitivities make it all but impossible for social scientists to

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<sup>46</sup> Nicolas Becquelin, “Xinjiang in the Nineties,” *The China Journal* 44(2000): 84.

<sup>47</sup> “Governor Says Xinjiang Suffering Separatist Violence,” Agence France-Presse (March 1999), quoted in Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 115.

<sup>48</sup> Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 112–113.

<sup>49</sup> Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 119.

conduct the kind of field research, interviews, and surveys in Xinjiang that would be the norm for rigorous study elsewhere.”<sup>50</sup> As such, data from such studies must be taken with the consideration of the above.

Finally, Starr makes a good point on the intentionality of the Chinese government. He states: “Most analyses of the current predicament in Xinjiang, whether positive or negative, simply assume intentionality on the part of Beijing. By doing so, they may miss an important element of the story, namely, the ways in which Beijing finds itself unexpectedly confronted by the unintended consequences of its own actions.”<sup>51</sup> Intentionality is incredibly challenging to decipher, but especially in the world of policies as officially stated intentions often times do not line up with the true purposes of actions and policies. It is dangerous, however, to make the assumption that all actions and policies of the Chinese government are based on ‘evil’ intentions, even if that appears to be an easy conclusion. To look at all policies through such a lens could inhibit the belief in change and hinder steps toward progress.

## **E. METHODS AND SOURCES**

To gauge the relative consolidation of Uyghur political action, this thesis examines the responses of Uyghurs to Chinese government policies, looking specifically at how Chinese policies have influenced Uyghur identity, interests, and potential Islamic mobilization. Uyghur responses to Chinese policies are examined primarily through published reports from researchers who have conducted surveys and interviews with Uyghurs. Most of the research materials will come from works done by Dru Gladney, Justin Rudelson, James Millward, Gardner Bovingdon, and S. Fredrick Starr. Other sources include reports from NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Additionally, Chinese government white papers, Chinese news reports, and reports from Uyghur transnational organizations such as the WUC, the ETIC, and the UAA have been examined. The possibility of Uyghur Islamic radicalization is evaluated in the context of Marc Sageman’s theory on Islamic radicalization. Sageman argues that

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50 Starr, *Xinjiang*, 15–16.

51 Starr, *Xinjiang*, 20.

there are four dynamics that all must be in play for radicalization to occur: moral outrage, a perception that there is a war against Islam, resonance with personal experiences, and the existence of networks to facilitate mobilization. If Uyghur responses line up with these four factors, there is reason to believe that Islamic radicalization can or has occurred in Xinjiang.

#### **F. THESIS OVERVIEW**

This thesis is divided into six parts. Following this introduction and literature review, Chapter II provides a general overview and background on the Uyghur people and the Xinjiang region. Chapter III examines the Chinese policies directed toward the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Chapter IV discusses the different responses the Uyghurs have had toward the Chinese policies. Chapter V is an assessment of Uyghur political consolidation based on the examination of Uyghur identity, interests, and Islamic mobilization in response to Chinese policies. This chapter attempts to explain why or why not the Uyghurs are experiencing significant political consolidation. Chapter VI provides conclusions as the final section.

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## II. BACKGROUND

### A. WHO ARE THE UYGHURS?

Today, the group of people known as the Uyghurs refers to the Turkic and Muslim people living predominantly in the northwestern part of the PRC. According to the 2000 census, Uyghurs numbered 8.3 million, about 45.2 percent of the population in Xinjiang.<sup>52</sup> According to some Uyghur sources such as the WUC and the UAA, the estimate is significantly higher at 15 to 20 million Uyghurs.<sup>53</sup> Uyghurs are culturally distinct from ethnic Han Chinese. To start with, Uyghurs look different than Hans, having physical features of both Europeans and East Asians. Most Uyghurs are also Sunni Muslims, their ancestors having converted to Islam in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Uyghurs speak a Turkic language and eat halal food, most notably abstaining from pork, a favorite meat for many Hans. The obvious cultural and social differences have been argued as a reason for continued ethnic conflict.

The history and identity of the Uyghurs is a complicated issue, and in many ways, lie at the heart of the Uyghur and Chinese government conflict. Both sides of the conflict have used history to serve its own political purposes. Many Uyghurs contend that they are a distinct people group that have existed for at least four thousand years in the region and are hence the true indigenous people of the area. According to the WUC: “Historically and culturally, East Turkestan is part of Central Asia, not of China. The people of East Turkestan are not Chinese; they are Turks of Central Asia.”<sup>54</sup> Uyghur nationalists paint the picture of an independent past with the sovereignty of the Uyghur nation only relatively recently usurped by the Chinese.

The Chinese government, on the other hand, contends that the region has been a part of “China” for just as long, and that ethnic Han Chinese were actually in the region

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<sup>52</sup> “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People and the Uyghurs of East Turkestan,” Uyghur Human Rights Project, accessed May 30, 2012, [http://docs.uyghuramerican.org/final\\_UNDRIP.pdf](http://docs.uyghuramerican.org/final_UNDRIP.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> “Brief History of East Turkestan.”

<sup>54</sup> “Brief History of East Turkestan.”

prior to the Uyghurs.<sup>55</sup> Chinese officials assert that military and administrative jurisdiction over Xinjiang had been established since the Han Dynasty in 60 B.C.<sup>56</sup> They conclude, therefore, that the Uyghurs are a part of China’s “great family of *minzu* [nationalities].”<sup>57</sup>

Scholars have pointed out discrepancies in both Uyghur and Chinese government arguments. Nevertheless, despite historical inaccuracies, each side has won over significant number of believers. The subject of history in Xinjiang is not so much of an issue of validity as it is an issue of identity. Among many other factors, the persistence of an alternative history that defines the Uyghurs as unique and distinct from the Chinese provides fuel for continued ethnic tensions. The complexity and challenges of the Uyghur identity will be furthered explored in Chapter V.

## **B. XINJIANG—THE “NEW FRONTIER”**

Xinjiang is an important place for both the Chinese government and the Uyghurs for various economic, political, and security reasons. With about two-thirds of China’s oil imports coming from the Middle East and Africa, the importance of expanding energy sources prompts the PRC to place a high value on Xinjiang to decrease its vulnerability in energy security.<sup>58</sup> Efforts to integrate the region into China have not been easy. In addition to the significant size of disgruntled ethnic minorities, another tremendous challenge with the province is its harsh environmental conditions.

The province of Xinjiang is the largest in China, with an area of over 1.6 million square kilometers—the size of Great Britain, France, Germany, and Spain combined—but with only 1.5 percent of China’s population.<sup>59</sup> The relatively sparse population speaks to the inhospitableness of the region. The immense Taklamakan Desert makes up a significant portion of southern Xinjiang, acting as a sand-trap, burying towns and

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55 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 30.

56 “History and Development of Xinjiang.”

57 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 26.

58 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 301.

59 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 4.

suffocating travelers caught without shelter with seasonal sandstorms.<sup>60</sup> The Tarim Basin in southern Xinjiang offer limited areas for agriculture, mainly through extensive irrigation. A chain of oases run along the basin, persisting through spring-fed and mountain run-off water. The Zungharian Basin in the northern part of the province consists of both desert and grasslands and also offers limited areas such as the fertile Ili valley for agriculture.

Extensive attempts at controlling the environment, namely water exploitation, have come under the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC), also known as the *bingtuan*. The XPCC has rapidly cultivated and expanded arable land, but in the process has also created significant environmental damage. Soil exhaustion, salinification, lowered water tables, and deforesting have resulted from the sizeable population growth and efforts to manipulate the land. Fifty-three of the eighty-seven counties and municipal districts in Xinjiang have suffered desertification.<sup>61</sup> One Chinese source on the environment and sustainable development in Xinjiang defined over 47 percent of Xinjiang as “wasteland.”<sup>62</sup>

Hans have settled predominantly in the central and northern regions of Xinjiang in developed cities such as Ürümqi. In most urban areas Hans dominate the population—Ürümqi, Karamay, and Changji all have more than 75 percent Han.<sup>63</sup> Hans also hold the majority of the population in cities such as Altay, Hami, and Aksu. In contrast, most Uyghurs live in the southern and predominantly rural regions of Xinjiang. Uyghurs are the majority in cities such as Turpan, Kashgar, and Khotän—leading to the bitter joke that the “Uyghurs’ ‘autonomous region’ is to be found only in the wastes of Tarim.”<sup>64</sup> The obvious north-south divide has been further highlighted by the earlier mentioned differences in GDP per capita between the two regions. The southern region from

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60 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 6.

61 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 317.

62 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 317.

63 Stanley Toops, “The Demography of Xinjiang,” in *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Fredrick Starr (New York: Central Asia-Caucus Institute), 255.

64 Toops, “Demography of Xinjiang,” 255–256.

Khotän to Kashgar is one of the poorest areas in all of China.<sup>65</sup> Overall, areas with populations of Han majorities have higher GDP per capita than areas with Uyghur majorities, perhaps due to the disproportionate number of Hans holding favorable and higher paying “staff and worker” positions compared to non-Hans.<sup>66</sup>

The lure of the “new frontier” has been too much for many Chinese to resist. Although Xinjiang boasts of the highest GDP per capita outside of the coastal provinces, it is due to its relative sparse population and oil production industry.<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, despite ethnic tensions and the harsh environment, migration to the province has persisted. As the government continues in its attempt to control the land and its people, it remains to be seen how mounting environmental and demographic pressures will impact the region.

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65 Toops, “Demography of Xinjiang,” 260.

66 Calla Wiemer, “The Economy of Xinjiang,” in *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Fredrick Starr (New York: Central Asia-Caucus Institute, 2004), 179.

67 Toops, “Demography of Xinjiang,” 260.

### **III. CHINESE GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES TOWARD UYGHURS IN XINJIANG**

As stated in Chapter I, the Chinese government's policies toward the Uyghurs in Xinjiang can be broken down into two unofficial broad categories. The first consists of policies that are focused on the assimilation and social and economic development of Uyghurs. Policies under this first category include regulations on minorities' languages, affirmative action policies in education, and the "Develop the West" (xibu da kaifa) campaign aimed to increase the economic infrastructure in the region. The second category consists of "hard" policies, many falling under the "Strike Hard, Maximize Pressure" campaign launched by the Chinese government in 1996. The Strike Hard campaign consists of tough measures used to crack down on any activities deemed by the government as "separatist" or "terrorist" in nature. This hard-hitting approach includes restrictions on civil liberties such as the freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion. It also includes arrests, detention, and at times executions of dissidents in the name of combating the "three evils" of "separatism, extremism and terrorism."

#### **A. ASSIMILATION POLICIES**

##### **1. Language Policies**

Beginning in the early 2000s, the Chinese government has taken increasing actions to raise the Mandarin literacy and fluency levels of minority students in Xinjiang. The primary reason given by officials has been to "meet the growing needs of economic and social development" in the region.<sup>68</sup> Various measures have been implemented by the government toward this goal under the justification of ensuring "bilingual" education. At the preschool level, the government provides monetary incentives for minority parents to send their children to Chinese language schools instead of Uyghur language schools. In seven agricultural prefectures in Xinjiang, students attending Chinese language

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<sup>68</sup> "Xinjiang University to Teach Major Subjects in Chinese: Official," *Xinhua News*, June 7, 2002, accessed May 26 2012, <http://www.humanrights-china.org/news/2002-6-8/Local200268101140.htm>.

preschools receive a subsidy of 1.5 yuan a day.<sup>69</sup> The government has invested millions of RMB to establish Chinese language preschools and to train bilingual teachers.<sup>70</sup> In addition, since 2002, the language of instruction at the university level has shifted to Mandarin. In the past, two faculties had been maintained for instruction in both Mandarin and Uyghur.<sup>71</sup>

## **2. “Develop the West” Campaign**

The “Develop the West” campaign, also known as the “Open up the West,” was initiated in 1999 by the PRC to improve the economic and social conditions of the less developed western regions of the country. Xinjiang was to be top priority in this campaign, as stated by the chairman of Xinjiang in 2001.<sup>72</sup> The campaign included the plan to invest 900 billion yuan over ten years in sizable projects such as the west to east natural gas pipeline, connecting Lunnan in the Tarim Basin to Shanghai, and the rehabilitation of the Tarim River.<sup>73</sup> Other projects include developments in transportation, communication, agriculture, and energy expansion.

The Chinese government has repeatedly expressed that economic development and improvement in the standard of living for minorities would improve ethnic relations in Xinjiang and decrease ethnic unrest. The “Develop the West” campaign is touted by the PRC as part of the plan to resolve the backwardness of Uyghurs and other minorities. Chinese officials point to improvements in standards of living, increases in life expectancy, incomes, and educational levels of minorities as evidences that the Chinese government has been indispensable to the development of Xinjiang. Related to this belief

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<sup>69</sup> “Putonghua Push in Uygur Nursery Schools,” *South China Morning Post*, February 2, 2006, accessed May 26, 2012, <http://www.uyghurnews.com/american/Read.asp?UighurNews=putonghua-push-in-uygur-nursery-schools&ItemID=UB-21720081819115325456669>.

<sup>70</sup> “Uyghur Language Under Attack”.

<sup>71</sup> Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 345.

<sup>72</sup> Becquelin, “Staged Development,” 363.

<sup>73</sup> Becquelin, “Staged Development,” 364.

is the significant migration of ethnic Hans into Xinjiang, argued by many as key in the development in Xinjiang in the past and necessary for the continued progress of the region.

### **3. Migration of Han into Xinjiang**

According to official Chinese data, in 1941 Uyghurs made up 80 percent and Hans 5 percent of the population in Xinjiang.<sup>74</sup> By 2000, Uyghurs made up only 45.2 percent of the population and Hans had increased dramatically to 40.6 percent (7.49 million people).<sup>75</sup> This number for the Hans does not include the so-called “floating population” of non-registered migrant workers (estimated at hundreds of thousands or even millions), or the military and security personnel in Xinjiang.<sup>76</sup> As stated earlier in the thesis, the Han population growth rate between 1990 and 2000 was 31.6 percent—twice that of the ethnic minority population.<sup>77</sup>

Deliberate Han migration to the Xinjiang region dates back to the Qing era. Initially, Han migration was mostly limited to the military and to the northern region. In fact, from the period of 1760 to 1830, Chinese were not allowed to settle permanently in or bring their families to the Tarim Basin.<sup>78</sup> Qing authorities did not allow or encouraged Chinese migration into the Tarim until after 1831. After the Communist take-over in 1949, the PRC government similarly resettled large numbers from the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), demobilized troops, cadres, workers, and students to the region. In 1954 the XPCC was established. It was comprised mainly of demobilized PLA and Kuomintang (KMT) troops and political and criminal prisoners. By 1955, the XPCC had brought in over 110,000 people to Xinjiang.<sup>79</sup> Today the XPCC is estimated to have 2.48

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74 “United Nations Declaration.”

75 “United Nations Declaration.”

76 Toops, “Demography of Xinjiang,” 249.

77 Becquelin, “Staged Development,” 369.

78 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 104.

79 Toops, “Demography of Xinjiang,” 246.

million people.<sup>80</sup> From the 1950s to the 1970s the PRC openly encouraged Han migration to Xinjiang and officially resettled millions of Hans to the region.

Since the 1990s, the Chinese government has not explicitly encouraged nor mandated Han migration to Xinjiang. The Chinese government has denied that the significant inflow of Han is a deliberate attempt in the sinicization of Xinjiang. Nevertheless, the “Develop the West” campaign has encouraged this migration and the government has continued to facilitate migrants to the region with the goal of rapid economic development in Xinjiang.<sup>81</sup> Many disadvantaged Han seek greater opportunities in the west, with or without state incentives to do so.

## **B. “STRIKE HARD, MAXIMIZE PRESSURE” CAMPAIGN**

As stated earlier in Chapter I, in 2002 the Chinese government released a report stating that between 1990 and 2001, “East Turkistan” terrorist forces were responsible for over 200 terrorist incidents, 162 deaths, and over 440 injuries.<sup>82</sup> As a direct response to the ethnic turmoil and violence of the early 1990s, the “Strike Hard, Maximize Pressure” campaign was launched in 1996 to combat the “three evils” of “separatism, extremism and terrorism.” The Chinese government vowed to crack down hard on terrorist forces that it claimed were responsible for explosions, assassinations, attacks on police and government institutions, poisonings and arson, establishing secret training bases and raising money to buy and manufacture arms and ammunition, plotting and organizing disturbances and riots, and creating an atmosphere of fear.<sup>83</sup> Under the campaign, restrictions on civil liberties, arrests, detentions, and executions have occurred.

### **1. Restrictions on Civil Liberties**

The PRC’s Constitution states in Article 35 that: “Citizens of the People’s Republic of China enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, of association, of

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80 Becquelin, “Staged Development,” 366.

81 Toops, “Demography of Xinjiang,” 247.

82 “Get Away with Impunity.”

83 “Get Away with Impunity.”

procession and of demonstration.”<sup>84</sup> In reality, such liberties are severely limited in Xinjiang. There are no real suitable ways for individuals to express discontent in Xinjiang, despite the fact that the PRC’s Constitution, under Article 41, states that citizens have the right to “criticize and make suggestions to any state organ or functionary.”<sup>85</sup> The PRC, extremely cautious of any potential for political unrest, generally deals harshly with those involved in expressing political discontent.

The Chinese government has stringent rules on both public demonstrations and private gatherings. This was especially true in Xinjiang after the Baren uprising in 1990. Shortly after the incident, in which protestors attacked people and destroyed property, the government passed new set of rules requiring all demonstrations to be cleared in advance by the government. A leader for the demonstration had to be identified and demonstrations were not to “threaten the unification of the estate, harm *minzu* solidarity, or compromise the interests of state, society or collective.”<sup>86</sup> With regard to private gatherings, the Chinese government in 1995 banned the mäšräp, a traditional social gathering that was revived in 1994 by Uyghurs to offer support and accountability to Uyghurs fighting against alcoholism and drug abuse. The mäšräp rapidly gained popularity and was not only successful at reducing alcohol and drug use but also in giving a sense of empowerment to the people.<sup>87</sup> The Chinese government, in response, banned the mäšräp and, on multiple occasions, detained the leader of the movement, Abdulhelil. The violent incident in Ghulja in 1997 was in part a response to this Chinese repressiveness. Despite the positive impact such private gatherings have on Uyghur society, Chinese authorities do not approve of any organizations that it does not control.

Literary works deemed subversive or inaccurate are also banned or even burned. Writers risk imprisonment and other forms of mistreatment. For example, Turghun Almas’ 1989 work *The Uyghurs* was banned in 1991 and Almas placed under house

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<sup>84</sup> “Constitution of the People’s Republic of China,” accessed June 3, 2012, <http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>.

<sup>85</sup> “Constitution.”

<sup>86</sup> Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 125.

<sup>87</sup> Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 125.

arrest. *The Uyghurs* provides an alternative history to the official history promoted by the Chinese government. Almas, a Uyghur nationalist, asserted in his work that Uyghurs had been a part of Xinjiang long before Han settled in the area. Uyghurs were, therefore, the true indigenous people of the region. In 2002 the *Kashgar Daily* newspaper published a list of 330 banned books that included Almas' works. Thousands of these banned works were publicly burned in Kashgar.<sup>88</sup> Another example is of the writer Nurmuhämät Yasin who had published the allegorical story titled “The Wild Pigeon” and was consequently sentenced in 2005 to 10 years in prison for “splittism.”<sup>89</sup>

The media is also tightly controlled in Xinjiang. The news is state controlled and the internet is heavily censored. Websites containing any information on Uyghur nationalism are blocked. Outside news coming in from abroad, provided through radio broadcasts from the BBC and the Voice of America (VOA), are frequently blocked by government jamming equipment. In 2004 the Chinese government spent \$40 million to purchase better jamming antennas.<sup>90</sup> Even in the entertainment industry, the government is wary of particular Uyghur songs. Some Uyghur artists face censorship during public performances or are prohibited outright to perform or make recordings. In the early 2000s, artists in Ürümqi were required to submit their lyrics to a censorship committee before recordings and performances, at times even directed to change their lyrics by the committee.<sup>91</sup>

## 2. Restrictions on Religious Activities

The PRC’s Constitution states in Article 36 that “citizens of the People’s Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief” and that “the state protects normal religious activities.”<sup>92</sup> In a 2003 White Paper, the government stated that it allocates funds every year to maintain and repair mosques and that in 1999 alone 7.6 million yuan was

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88 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 343.

89 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 100–101.

90 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 103.

91 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 96.

92 “Constitution of the PRC.”

allocated to reconstruct three mosques in Xinjiang.<sup>93</sup> The document goes on the state that the government protects the legal rights and interests of religious organizations and ensures religious texts and publications are available to believers of various faiths.

During most of the 1980s, under Deng Xiaoping's reforms, the PRC did experience a relative expansion in religious freedoms and the relaxing of some restrictions on religious activities. During this time new mosques were built and Uyghurs were allowed to travel abroad to Islamic countries. However, since the late 1980s and especially after the ethnic uprisings in the 1990s, the Chinese government has tightened its control again on religious activities in Xinjiang. Soon after the launch of the "Strike Hard" campaign, religious leaders were required to undergo "patriotic re-education," restrictions were placed on the number of permits permitting people to go on hajj, and minors were prohibited to enter mosques or to participate in religious activities.<sup>94</sup> According to the 1999 Amnesty report on Xinjiang, many mosques and Koranic schools have been closed down, religious leaders deemed "subversive" by the government have been dismissed or arrested, and religious activities not considered "normal" stopped.<sup>95</sup> In addition, party members and those working in government offices are forbidden to practice their faiths. A 1996 document from the CCP Central Committee states that "Communist Party members and cadres are Marxist materialists and, therefore, should not be allowed to believe in and practice religion."<sup>96</sup> The 1999 Amnesty report also references a 1997 article in the *Xinjiang Daily* that states: "Those party members who firmly believe in religion and who refuse to change their ways after education should be given a certain time period to make corrections, be persuaded to withdraw from the party or dismissed from the party according to the seriousness of their case."<sup>97</sup>

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93 "History and Development in Xinjiang."

94 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 343.

95 "People's Republic of China: Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region," Amnesty International (1999): 10.

96 "Document No. 7," Chinese Communist Party Central Committee (1996), quoted in James Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 342.

97 "Gross Violations," 10.

### **3. Arrests, Detention, and Executions of Dissidents**

The Chinese government denies that it holds any political prisoners. In a report released in 2002, the government states that it “targets only a few core members and criminals who have schemed, directed and participated in violent terrorist incidents” and toward the rest of the people involved, who had been “hoodwinked” into participating, the Chinese government “adopts the attitude of educating and helping them, and welcomes them back to the truth path.”<sup>98</sup> In the same document, the Chinese government denies that it targets any particular ethnic group or any particular religion but only targets criminals.

In 1999, the National People’s Congress passed a law that identified “crimes against the state” and included “ethnic discrimination” and “stirring up anti-ethnic sentiment under such crimes.”<sup>99</sup> Human rights groups have argued that this has allowed the Chinese government to arrest and imprison political activists. Whether or not those detained by Chinese authorities are guilty or innocent of any crimes, the fact remains that there are many prisoners being held without trial and often times without knowing the charges against them. Amnesty International has documented numerous cases of arbitrary detention and imprisonment, unfair trials, torture, and extra-judicial executions. Trials are often held behind closed doors and without defense lawyers. In some cases, trials are held in front of hundreds or thousands of people at “public sentencing rallies.”<sup>100</sup> Those who receive the death penalty during these public rallies are often executed immediately after the rallies.<sup>101</sup> Amnesty International has recorded at least 210 death sentences in Xinjiang between 1997 and 1999, the majority of those executed being Uyghurs.<sup>102</sup>

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98 “Get Away with Impunity.”

99 Gladney, “Responses to Chinese Rule,” 381.

100 “Gross Violations,” 34.

101 “Gross Violations,” 52.

102 “Gross Violations,” 51.

## IV. UYGHUR RESPONSES

Uyghur responses to the PRC's policies in Xinjiang have varied, including assimilation, overt resistance, and covert resistance. Overt resistance ranges from peaceful protests and demonstrations to violent riots and attacks on people and property. Covert resistance, also called "everyday" resistance by Bovingdon, is found mainly in private Uyghur settings and reveals more a mindset than actual actions against the government. Uyghur responses from the diaspora are also important to explore, especially with regard to Uyghur transnational organizations.

### A. ASSIMILATION

As stated in the literature review, many urban Uyghurs, particularly intellectuals, tend to advocate for Uyghurs to master the Mandarin language, arguing that only through the Mandarin language and secular education will the Uyghurs become better equipped to compete against the Hans. Many Uyghur intellectuals believe that Uyghur progress must come through science and Western education.<sup>103</sup> The adoption of the Mandarin language, however, brings challenges to maintaining Uyghur culture and identity and fluency in the mother tongue. Rudelson and Jankowiak point out that Uyghurs who speak Mandarin tend to be more secular because their proficiency has allowed them greater exposure to Han secular life.<sup>104</sup> In addition, anthropological research suggests that "Uyghurs educated in the Chinese-language schools do not attain the same degree of facility in their native languages as Uyghurs schooled in their own languages."<sup>105</sup> In response to these challenges, many Uyghur families send their sons to Mandarin-language schools and their daughters to Uyghur-language schools in the hopes that the daughters will continue to pass on the Uyghur language onto to their children.<sup>106</sup> This response reveals that although many Uyghurs believe that a certain degree of assimilation

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<sup>103</sup> Justin Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism along China's Silk Road* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 144.

<sup>104</sup> Rudelson and Jankowiak, "Acculturation and Resistance," 313.

<sup>105</sup> Benson, "Education and Social Mobility," 191.

<sup>106</sup> Rudelson and Jankowiak, "Acculturation and Resistance," 313.

is essential to improving the lot of their people, many still believe their culture to be unique and vitally important to preserve.

## **B. OVERT RESISTANCE**

Overt resistance by Uyghurs has ranged from peaceful protests and demonstrations to violent riots and attacks on people and property. In many circumstances, events starting off as peaceful protests or demonstrations would deteriorate into violence. Data collected by Bovingdon on organized protests and violent events in Xinjiang, most of them documented in multiple sources, give us an idea of the frequency and nature of such overt events. Since 1980 there have been the following number of incidents between Uyghurs and the Chinese government (or ethnic Hans in the region): 37 bombings, 15 successful assassinations, 3 attempted assassinations, 14 murders (to include Hans and Uyghurs or other non-Hans who worked for the government), 2 stabbings, 2 acts of assault on Hans, 19 non-violent demonstrations and protests, 1 act of “insurgency” (attempt to establish independent East Turkistan Republic), 17 acts of arson, and 47 violent riots or clashes (to include gunfights, attacks on government personnel and property, and arrests ending up in violence).<sup>107</sup>

Two notable violent incidents in the 1990s were the Baren uprising in April of 1990 and the Ghulja uprising in February of 1997. These two events greatly alarmed Chinese authorities, to which the effects are still felt today. Accounts differ on the apparent causes and consequences of both events. According to Chinese sources, the Baren uprising was the result of radical Islamic insurgents, assisted by the “East Turkistan Islamic Party” calling for a jihad against the Chinese government.<sup>108</sup> Other reports propose that the armed uprising was fueled by Uyghurs’ objections to nuclear tests, restrictive family planning policies, and the perception of Han exploitation of Xinjiang’s resources.<sup>109</sup> After surrounding government offices in Baren, protestors launched an armed assault, attacking and killing people and destroying property with

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107 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 178–190.

108 “Get Away with Impunity.”

109 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 124.

bombs and firearms. Reports on the outcome of the Baren incident vary—international sources estimate over 60 killed but the official death toll is 22 (6 police, 1 cadre, and 15 or 16 demonstrators or insurgents).<sup>110</sup> Other sources estimate the death toll up to 3,000 people.<sup>111</sup>

The Ghulja incident was again blamed on Islamist terrorism by Chinese officials. However, other works by foreign scholars and Amnesty International revealed that the event was a response to the Chinese government's attempts to do away with the mäšräp some few years earlier.<sup>112</sup> As mentioned earlier in Chapter III, the Chinese government officially banned the mäšräp in 1995 and detained its leader Abdulhelil on multiple occasions. The government had also gone as far as preventing the gathering of a youth soccer league organized by Abdulhelil by removing goalposts and taking the field for “military exercises,” and even brought in snipers during a peaceful, albeit “illegal,” march.<sup>113</sup> The Chinese government’s harsh stance toward the mäšräp provoked Abdulhelil and others to plan the Ghulja protest, believed by some to have been a peaceful event that unfortunately escalated into violence during the crackdowns.<sup>114</sup>

Again, accounts differ on the aftermath of the Ghulja incident, ranging from 300 to 500 arrests on the first day, followed by extensive arbitrary arrests ranging from 3,000 to 5,000 in the two weeks following the protest.<sup>115</sup> There were also reports of abuses by soldiers and riot police, to include accounts of security forces hosing down 300 or 400 protestors and residents with icy cold water. These people were allegedly kept outside for hours in the freezing cold temperatures, resulting in cases of frostbite and amputations.<sup>116</sup> The Chinese government’s accounts on Ghulja, interestingly enough, were inconsistent within themselves. One Ghulja police spokesman denied that anything

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110 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 124.

111 Rudelson and Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance,” 316.

112 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 125.

113 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 126.

114 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 128.

115 “Gross Violations,” 19–20.

116 “Gross Violations,” 19.

had happened, while the autonomous regional government reported that same day that there were 10 deaths and 130 arrests.<sup>117</sup>

Both the Baren and Ghulja incidents are interesting cases to examine because both conflicts had religious dimensions. The Baren uprising started in a mosque. During the incident, some protestors called for a jihad, and many recited the *shahada*, an Islamic declaration that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the messenger of God.<sup>118</sup> Soon after the confrontation, the Chinese government broadcasted alleged weapons and religious texts of the “insurgents,” to include a booklet that called for a jihad and the killing of “infidels.”<sup>119</sup> During the Ghulja incident, protestors carried banners with religious messages and shouted religious slogans.<sup>120</sup>

It is also important to note the swiftness with which these events escalated in size and intensity. As Bovingdon points out, specific incidents can be recognized as “triggers” for such upheavals, but “the speed, violence, and scope of the popular response point to pent-up anger that had grown over a long period” and “while the precipitating events account for the timing of the protests, they cannot by themselves explain these protests.”<sup>121</sup> Thus far, the Chinese government has chosen to respond to such incidents with repressive measures rather than attempt to address grievances.

### **C. COVERT RESISTANCE—“EVERYDAY” RESISTANCE**

The literature review briefly discusses the covert resistance that Bovingdon calls “everyday resistance.” Bovingdon argues that because of the repressiveness of the CCP’s rule, many Uyghurs have resorted to covert instead of overt resistance. This covert

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117 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 127.

118 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 124.

119 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 124.

120 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 332.

121 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 123.

resistance includes grumbling, songs, jokes, satire, and political fantasy, all in the Uyghur language, which offers a degree of concealment since only a small percentage of Hans know the language.<sup>122</sup>

The importance with everyday resistance is it helps to solidify Uyghur identity and keeps Uyghur nationalism alive. Grumbling, songs, jokes, satire, and political fantasy all provide alternate perspectives to the official narrative imposed upon by the Chinese government. Most importantly, everyday resistance helps to maintain and spread the belief that Uyghurs are distinctly different than and fundamentally incompatible with Hans. Such ideas have very real consequences, even if they fail to restrain Chinese policies or produce obvious economic or political advancement. Such ideas keep alive the hope and motivation to fight for independence or greater autonomy. And because of such hope, Bovingdon argues that “if the central state faltered or a new leader ushered in a period of political openness, change might be possible.”<sup>123</sup> Therefore, despite the decrease in overt resistance, one must be careful not to conclude that Uyghurs are either content or defeated.<sup>124</sup>

#### **D. DIASPORA RESISTANCE**

Uyghurs living outside of Xinjiang generally have far greater freedom to express opposition against the Chinese government. Because of the repressiveness of the CCP rule, it is through the diaspora that “Uyghur oppositional voices continue to be heard.”<sup>125</sup> Notable Uyghur transnational organizations grew in numbers during the 1990s, and although the numbers have decreased in the last decade, many continue to grow today in influence by utilizing the internet. These groups can be found in Central Asian countries such as Turkey but also in Europe and North America. Uyghur transnational organizations advocate for a range of causes, from advancing human rights, promoting greater autonomy in the province, to demanding absolute independence of Xinjiang from

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122 Bovingdon, “Not-So-Silent,” 43.

123 Bovingdon, “Not-So-Silent,” 68.

124 Bovingdon, “Not-So-Silent,” 40.

125 Gladney, “Responses to Chinese Rule,” 383.

China. The primary function for many of these groups is to provide information and enable networking for those interested in the Uyghur cause. Many transnational organizations produce and distribute materials to Uyghurs in and out of China.

It is important to note that access to these transnational organizations is mostly limited to the diaspora. Because the internet is the primary means to garner support, transnational organizations face challenges with reaching Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Many Uyghurs in China are actually unaware of such sites because of internet censorship, the high costs of internet access, and, in some cases, the general lack of technology.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, despite these challenges to so-called “cyber-separatism,” Uyghur transnational organizations have “helped shape the way the world views the region” by providing information to people beyond the borders of Xinjiang.<sup>127</sup> In addition, these groups have helped to maintain Uyghur nationalism with their materials, “sustaining both Uyghurs’ sense of themselves as a distinct people and their belief in the possibility of independence in the future.”<sup>128</sup>

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126 Gladney, “Responses to Chinese Rule,” 388.

127 Gladney, “Responses to Chinese Rule,” 389.

128 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 137.

## **V. ASSESSING UYGHUR POLITICAL CONSOLIDATION – UNITED OR DIVIDED?**

What do Uyghur responses tell us about how the Chinese government's policies have influenced their political consolidation? First, have Chinese policies helped to strengthen or weaken Uyghur identity? Are the policies working to integrate Uyghurs into the greater Han society or have they served to further alienate the group? Second, how have Chinese policies shaped Uyghur interests? Do the policies give Uyghurs the tangible conditions to unite together and focus on common grievances? Finally, is there any evidence of Islamic radicalization and mobilization of Uyghurs in Xinjiang? Has the repressiveness of Chinese policies towards Uyghurs in any way influenced Uyghurs to seek terrorism as a response?

This thesis argues that the PRC's policies in Xinjiang have increased Uyghur solidarity socially but not politically. Uyghurs have increasingly embraced the belief in a common identity as a direct response to the Chinese government's repressive policies. An "us" versus "them" mentality has developed as a result of real and perceived discrimination and persecution. Uyghurs, despite their diversity, have increasingly adopted the belief that they are a part of a single community that is under threat from a common adversary. Improvements in technology and infrastructure have also helped to close the geographical and cultural gaps between the disparate Uyghur groups. Nevertheless, actual political consolidation has been limited due to numerous reasons, to include the overwhelming Chinese state capacity to suppress dissent, and challenges in reaching consensus amongst the diverse transnational groups because of inherent differences. Finally, this thesis argues that there are currently no indications of Islamic radicalization and mobilization of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

This chapter is broken down into three sections. The first section looks at the influence Chinese policies have had on Uyghur identity. The second section examines Uyghur interests and the challenges and progress that have been made towards achieving

significant political consolidation. The third section analyzes the possibility of Islamic radicalization and mobilization, evaluated in the context of Marc Sageman's theory on Islamic radicalization.

#### **A. THE UYGHUR IDENTITY: COMPLICATED BUT COMING TOGETHER**

As mentioned earlier, the region's place in history as part of the Silk Road has brought with it cultures from all over the world – India, Europe, the Middle East, and China. The diversity of these indigenous people cannot be ignored. The term “Uyghur” has not always been used to describe the current group of people, but has been used to describe different peoples throughout history. There were no references to Uyghurs in the accounts of travelers in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – instead, people were described with oasis-identifying names such as Kashgarlik, Turpanlik, and Khotanlik.<sup>129</sup> The geography of Xinjiang has posed physical challenges to the cohesion of the province. Deserts and mountains have separated groups living in the region for generations, creating distinct local identities.<sup>130</sup>

Two examples of such distinctions still found today are of the Uyghurs in Kashgar and the Uyghurs living in Ili. Kashgar is the only place in Xinjiang where women wear head veils that completely cover their heads. Kashgar also has the highest number of Koranic schools in Xinjiang and is arguably the most unstable region in the province for pan-Turkic and anti-Chinese sentiments.<sup>131</sup> In contrast, Ililik, or Uyghurs from the region of Ili, have perhaps the most secular outlooks and lifestyles compared to other Uyghurs. Ililik embrace Western clothing, keep up with global events, and see themselves as superior to other Uyghurs. Women do not wear veils in Ili and there are no

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<sup>129</sup> Dru Gladney, *Dislocating China: Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 229.

<sup>130</sup> Rudelson & Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance,” 302.

<sup>131</sup> Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 153.

Islamic schools. The Chinese government has also reinforced the Ililikhs' sense of superiority – the Ili dialect is the standard used for the Uyghur language in education and for public broadcasts.<sup>132</sup>

Some scholars have argued that the artificial creation of the Uyghur identity came in the 1930s with the Soviet style policy of nationalist recognition. This policy designated groups of “tremendous regional and linguistic diversity” in Xinjiang under the single label of “Uyghur.”<sup>133</sup> About 95 percent of the indigenous peoples in Xinjiang became identified as Uyghurs.<sup>134</sup> This policy included groups such as the Loplik and Dolan – groups that did not previously have any significant association or ties to the oasis-based Turkic Muslims who later became known as the Uyghurs.<sup>135</sup> Some scholars have argued that the heart of the Uyghur identity still lies with the respective family, clan, and oasis, rather than with the whole designated ethnic group.<sup>136</sup> Competing territorial allegiances, differences between religious factions, and linguistic dissimilarities are cited as some of the challenges to a unified Uyghur identity.<sup>137</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the process of construction, many Uyghurs today accept the designation and do not question the origins of their identity. The majority of Uyghurs agree that they are Uyghurs, even though that identity differs amongst different Uyghurs. In many ways, the development of the Uyghur identity was a direct response to both the growing Chinese nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the growing presence of Han Chinese in the Xinjiang region. Before the rise of modern nation-states, “ethnic identity was not as salient for social interaction and discourse.”<sup>138</sup>

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132 Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 162.

133 Gladney, *Dislocating China*, 195.

134 Rudelson & Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance,” 302—303.

135 Gladney, *Dislocating China*, 195.

136 Rudelson & Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance,” 302—303.

137 Gladney, *Dislocating China*, 195.

138 Gladney, *Dislocating China*, 209.

As Starr states: “Whether or not they considered themselves Uyghurs prior to their encounters with the Han Chinese establishment in Xinjiang, many came to think of themselves as Uyghurs thereafter.”<sup>139</sup>

The Chinese construction of the Uyghur people in the 1930s actually helped to solidify the Uyghur identity. The fact that 90 percent of the people designated as Uyghurs live in Xinjiang is proof to many Uyghurs that the province belongs to them.<sup>140</sup> And while cultural differences still exists, the differences are less pronounced than they used to be. The Chinese government’s role as the common adversary has brought a degree of social unity to the diverse Uyghur group. Overt resistance has kept alive the desire of many Uyghurs for independence, and covert resistance have has encouraged Uyghurs to continue resisting assimilation.

The heavy-handed approach of the PRC has at times produced unintended consequences that benefit the Uyghurs. The Chinese government’s harsh and disproportionate responses to protests and demonstrations have sent the inadvertent message to Uyghurs that the threat is greater than it really is. This misconception may actually help mobilize Uyghurs by encouraging them that Uyghur groups are more capable than really are or well-connected to other groups outside of Xinjiang. For example, during the various incidents of 1997, PRC officials had responded with disproportionate number of security forces to send the message of “swift and brutal retaliation,” but instead sent a different message that the state was afraid.<sup>141</sup> Similarly, PRC political materials that were supposed to warn Uyghur students against separatist movements instead inspired them, educating them of violent protests that occurred earlier in history, and convincing them of the “doggedness of Uyghur protestor[s]” and the “continuity of Uyghur dissatisfaction.”<sup>142</sup>

Additionally, harsh crackdowns have, in some instances, actually served to increase the prominence of certain groups and individuals. The government’s

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139 Starr, *Xinjiang*, 14.

140 Gladney, *Dislocating China*, 206.

141 Bovingdon, “Not-So-Silent,” 66.

142 Bovingdon, “Not-So-Silent,” 66—67.

persecution of Rabiyä Qadir (or Rebiya Kadeer) elevated her status to the international level as a champion for the Uyghur cause. Similarly, the condemnation of Turghun Almas' books launched him from obscurity into fame.<sup>143</sup> The act of book-banning also conveys to many that the Chinese government is fearful of these texts, convincing many on the validity of such works.<sup>144</sup> These unintended consequences of the PRC reveal that the Chinese government can promulgate propaganda but it cannot ultimately control the people's interpretation of that propaganda.<sup>145</sup>

In addition, improvements in technology and infrastructure have enabled greater communication between Uyghurs. Technologies such as phones, radios, and televisions have allowed Uyghurs to engage one another across distances and have helped to give Uyghurs a greater sense of unity. New roads and better transportation systems have given Uyghurs unprecedented ability to travel with relative ease, connecting previously isolated oasis communities to other Uyghurs. Greater ease in travel has also allowed Uyghurs to interact with Muslims outside of Xinjiang. This greater exposure has actually served to reinforce the Uyghurs' belief in their uniqueness and strengthened ties between their fellow Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang.<sup>146</sup> Perhaps most importantly, technologies such as tapes and radio broadcasts from abroad provide not only information but propagate Uyghur nationalist views. Even with the Chinese government's investment in jamming equipment to block radio signals from abroad, many Uyghurs responded by investing in shortwave radios to pull in signals through the jamming.<sup>147</sup>

## **B. THE STRUGGLE FOR POLITICAL CONSOLIDATION**

### **1. Repressiveness of the Chinese Government**

Violent confrontations have occurred periodically since the upheaval of the 1990s, but the repressiveness of the Chinese regime has effectively crushed and

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<sup>143</sup> Yitzhak Shichor, "Blow Up: Internal and External Challenges of Uyghur Separatism and Islamic Radicalism to Chinese Rule in Xinjiang," *Asian Affairs* 32 (2005): 126.

<sup>144</sup> Rudelson, *Oasis Identities*, 158.

<sup>145</sup> Bovingdon, "Not-So-Silent," 67.

<sup>146</sup> Gladney, *Dislocating China*, 224.

<sup>147</sup> Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 102—103.

discouraged opposition since that time. Since the late 1990s, documented “separatist” incidents in Xinjiang have decreased significantly.<sup>148</sup> The Chinese government has adopted the strategy of specifically targeting leaders of protests and exacting severe sentences to serve as warnings to others.<sup>149</sup> The strategy has been effective in deterring would-be-leaders. As a researcher documented in an interview with dissatisfied workers, many of the workers claimed that they would “definitely participate” in a protest, but were “waiting” for someone to organize the protest.<sup>150</sup> Public executions of protest leaders in Xinjiang also demonstrate the willingness of Chinese authorities to treat Xinjiang differently than the interior.<sup>151</sup>

PRC officials have attributed the decrease in violence and protests over the last decade to economic growth in the region and Uyghur contentment with PRC rule. But as Bovingdon convincingly argues: “viewed against the backdrop of increasing protests and violence in China proper and evidence of a pervasive wealth gap between Hans and Uyghurs in Xinjiang, the falling protest numbers indicate the success of the party-state’s actions to root out organizations and deter would-be protestors into quiescence – in short, not to resolve Uyghurs’ grievances but to deprive them of the sources and opportunities to articulate them publicly.”<sup>152</sup> In interviews conducted in 2002, a reporter documented that Uyghurs were more afraid of the police than of terrorists.<sup>153</sup>

The decrease in violence since the 1990s has also been explained away by the PRC as a strategic response by “terrorists” to lessen international attention. In the PRC’s 2002 report on terrorism, the document states that “East Turkistan” forces, in order to “erase their terrorist marks and conceal their label as a terrorist organization,” have

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148 Gladney, “Responses to Chinese Rule,” 382.

149 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 129.

150 Yongshun Cai, “The Resistance of Chinese Laid-off Workers in the Reform Period,” *China Quarterly* 170 (2002): 333, cited in Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 129—130.

151 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 130.

152 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 133—134.

153 Philip Pan, “In China’s West, Ethnic Strife Becomes ‘Terrorism’,” *Washington Post*, 15 July 2002, sec. A12, quoted in Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 132.

“demanded that their members not publish radical remarks for the time being.”<sup>154</sup> The report goes on further to state that “under the banner of protecting ‘human rights,’ ‘religious freedom,’ and ‘the interests of ethnic minorities,’ they claim that the Chinese government ‘has taken the opportunity to crackdown on ethnic minorities’ in an attempt to mislead the public and deceive international opinion, and thus dodge the international crackdown on terrorism.”<sup>155</sup> Such an un-falsifiable stance again reveals the unwillingness of the PRC to address grievances.

## **2. Challenges Facing Transnational Organizations**

Uyghur transnational organizations face various challenges in the attempt to establish unity. First, the Uyghur diaspora is spread throughout very different regions of the world, including Central Asia and Europe. Consequently, these groups disagree on the primary objectives and interests of a united Uyghur front, on whether to use violent or peaceful means to achieve their goals, and argue over who should have leadership. Second, Chinese pressures on Central Asian states have limited the support of fellow Turkic-speaking peoples to the Uyghurs.

Numerous attempts have been made to improve Uyghur political consolidation through transnational organizations. In 1992, Uyghurs from the diaspora gathered in Istanbul to establish the East Turkestan World National Congress. Serious disagreements, however, prevented any real progress. In 1999 another conference was held, this time in Munich. The plan was to establish a congress that would act as the single authoritative representative for all national and transnational groups. Again, the groups disagreed on significant issues such as tactics. Uyghurs from Western countries advocated for nonviolent methods, while Uyghurs from Central Asia argued that violence was the only realistic tactic left.<sup>156</sup> Even the naming of the organization proved contentious. Uyghurs from Central Asia favored a name that would include the name ‘Uyghurstan’, as their experiences were with nationally defined states, while Uyghurs

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154 “Get Away with Impunity.”

155 “Get Away with Impunity.”

156 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 147.

from Western industrialized democracies favored a “pluralist, civically defined state.”<sup>157</sup> The compromise was the cumbersome name of ‘East Turkestan (Uyghurstan) National Congress’.

The establishment of the World Uyghur Congress in 2004 is perhaps the most successful development thus far in the political consolidation of the Uyghurs. The WUC has been much more effective than the previous two national congresses in reaching consensus and has been accepted by many in the diaspora as the representative of Uyghur interests.<sup>158</sup> Nevertheless, despite the progress, no Uyghur transnational organization has yet been able to bring the Chinese government to the negotiating table.<sup>159</sup>

From the 1950s to the 1980s, the Uyghur independence movement was centered in Turkey, where over two thousand Uyghur refugees had escaped to after the PLA’s ‘liberation’ of Xinjiang.<sup>160</sup> During the 1990s, the hope for many Uyghurs was that fellow Turkic-speaking Muslims in the new sovereign states in Central Asia would support the Uyghurs’ struggle for independence. However, the combination of both the domestic politics of the Central Asian states and Beijing’s pressure has discouraged any support for the Uyghurs. Nationalists in Central Asia depicted Uyghurs “not as beleaguered cousins but as dangerous aliens” and leaders blamed domestic problems on ‘outsiders,’ generating xenophobia.<sup>161</sup> In the last few decades, Beijing has placed increasing pressure on Central Asian states to discourage and undermine any potential for Uyghur organizations to consolidate support. In exchange for economic aid from China, many Central Asian states promised not to provide assistance to Uyghur ‘separatists.’ In 1995, Kazakhstan and China signed an agreement that dictated Kazakhstan security forces to monitor and report Uyghur activities to Beijing.<sup>162</sup> The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has also given the Chinese government another means to cooperate

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157 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 148.

158 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 150.

159 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 137.

160 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 138.

161 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 146.

162 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 145.

with its neighbors to suppress Uyghur discontent. Central Asian states, Pakistan, and Nepal have all extradited Uyghurs accused of separatism back to China where many were executed upon return.<sup>163</sup> As a result of all these factors, the center of the Uyghur movement shifted from Central Asia to Western countries, where significantly fewer Uyghurs live.<sup>164</sup>

### **3. Greater International Attention**

Despite the challenges transnational organizations face, they have been successful at providing information to the international community, specifically through the internet. As these groups become increasing cohesive and effective, international human rights groups have increasingly included Uyghurs in their agendas, as apparent in 1995 with the elected chair of the Unrepresented Nations and People's Organizations being a Uyghur.<sup>165</sup>

The emergence of Rabiyä Qadir to the world stage has also given Uyghurs greater international attention. At the present, Qadir is perhaps the most recognizable figure for the Uyghur cause. She first gained fame in Xinjiang as the richest woman in the province. She soon became a thorn to the government's side with her increasingly vocal concerns for the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. She attracted international attention when she was arrested in 1999 and sentenced to six years in prison for "leaking state secrets."<sup>166</sup> Upon release from prison in 2005 for medical reasons, she moved to the United States and continued to champion the Uyghur cause from there. In a matter of months after she arrived to the United States, she became the head of the UAA. By the end of 2006, she was voted to be the president of the WUC. In 2005 and 2006 she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Despite the Chinese government's attempts to paint Qadir as a terrorist, her popularity and international standing has only grown in the last few years.

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163 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 223.

164 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 140.

165 Gladney, "Responses to Chinese Rule," 376.

166 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 153.

Although Qadir is not a leader in the same manner the Dalai Lama is to the Tibetans, mainly because she does not carry the religious significance or authority the Dalai Lama has as the reincarnate spiritual leader and the head of the Tibetan government in exile, she nevertheless has brought hope to many Uyghurs for an influential leader who can both unite the people and win international support. Her symbolic leadership as the “mother of the Uyghurs” also generates a sense of commonality among Uyghurs. In addition, as a female Muslim leader, Qadir has been able to combat some of the negative perceptions of Muslims as being oppressive to women.<sup>167</sup>

### **C. JIHAD? POLITICAL CONSOLIDATION IN THE FORM OF ISLAMIC RADICALIZATION AND MOBILIZATION**

Is there any evidence of Islamic radicalization and mobilization of Uyghurs in Xinjiang? Has the repressiveness of Chinese policies towards Uyghurs in any way influenced Uyghurs to seek terrorism as a response? Violence in Xinjiang in the last few decades has, without a doubt, increased international attention to the area. But do these acts of violence indicate Islamic radicalization or are they non-religiously motivated reactions to a repressive regime? This section of the thesis will evaluate the Uyghur responses to Chinese policies in the context of Marc Sageman’s theory on Islamic radicalization. Sageman argues that there are four dynamics that all must be in play for radicalization to occur: moral outrage, a perception that there is a war against Islam, resonance with personal experiences, and the existence of networks to facilitate mobilization. Are the Uyghurs experiencing the four dynamics of radicalization? If Uyghur responses line up with these four factors, there is reason to believe that Islamic radicalization can or has occurred in Xinjiang.

#### **1. Moral Outage**

Sageman defines “moral outrage” as the “strong motivational effects of hearing about or watching the suffering of fellow Muslims.”<sup>168</sup> This emotional response “has to

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167 Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, 155—156.

168 Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 72.

be brought about by human hands and seen as a major moral violation such as killing, injury, rape, or arrest – obvious physical injustice.”<sup>169</sup> He gives the example of the infamous video of the killing of a twelve year old Palestinian boy, Mohamed al-Dura, caught in the crossfire between Palestinian and Israeli forces in Gaza in 2000. The video provoked moral outrage because it was viewed as an unacceptable tragedy inflicted by Israelis. Anger is at the heart of this motivating force, especially if there exists some kind of relationship between the victims and the witnesses. Sageman argues that, “no amount of aid – rebuilding schools, digging new wells, outfitting hospitals – can change the calculus; moral violations count far more than attempts at restitution and forgiveness.”<sup>170</sup>

Evidence in earlier chapters strongly suggests that most Uyghurs feel a sense of moral outrage against the Chinese government. “Obvious physical injustice” can be used to describe the Chinese’s heavy handed approach to Uyghur discontent. The Chinese government has been accused by numerous NGOs of gross human rights violations in the form of torture and arbitrary arrests and executions. Scholars have also documented Uyghurs’ perception of and anger towards the PRC’s great moral violations.

## **2. War against Islam**

Sageman argues that moral outrage alone is not sufficient for radicalization. Another element towards radicalization is the adoption of a “moral universe” that the moral outrage fits into. Sageman finds that most Islamist terrorists adopt the belief that there is a war against Islam. This world view not only makes sense of the immorality that they see and outrage that they feel, but also provides them the sense of purpose in providing answers on how to respond. In this world view, “true” believers of the Islamic faith fight against the evil forces of this world (the degenerate West and/or the Jews). Sageman argues that: “All global Islamist terrorist ideologies share a moral reductionism, which ascribes simple causes, and their implied remedies, to complex events. This simplicity makes them easy to grasp, explain, and accept. This vagueness of these ideas

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169 Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 72.

170 Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 73—74.

about the nature of man, God, society, and history mixes politics and morality in a clear appeal for young Muslims to join the fight.”<sup>171</sup>

Evidence suggests that Uyghurs are divided when it comes to determining whether or not there is a war against Islam. On the one hand, the government’s crackdown on religious activities has without a doubt provoked anger and helped to rally protestors against the PRC. Some Uyghurs feel that it is because they are Muslims that they are labeled as terrorists. In 2002, the United States, in a controversial move, designated the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) as a terrorist organization. Many Uyghurs point out the fact that despite terrorist bombings and other violence in Tibet, the United States has yet to put a Tibetan separatist group on its terrorist organization list.<sup>172</sup>

However, despite the common belief by Uyghurs that the Chinese government has been harsh in its control on religious activities, many Uyghurs do not believe that there is a war against Islam in Xinjiang. Many do not see the crackdowns on religious activities as an attack on Islam specifically, but more as the government’s reaction to the fear that Islam may help to solidify ethnic nationalism. As mentioned earlier, even with greater exposure to the outside Muslim community through travels on the hajj to Mecca, many Uyghurs actually “gained a greater sense of affinity with their own as one people than with other multi-ethnic members of the international Islamic community.”<sup>173</sup> This disconnect between the Muslims in Xinjiang and the rest of the Muslim community is also reflected in the fact that Al Qaeda’s focus has always been on the Muslims in Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Chechnya – not China.<sup>174</sup> Many Uyghur nationalists are also secularist, especially the intellectuals and urban dwellers who tend to advocate for greater education and Westernization to compete against the Chinese. As Gladney asserts: “they would overthrow Chinese rule in Xinjiang in the name of Uyghur

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171 Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 80

172 Gladney, *Dislocating China*, 252—253.

173 Gladney, *Dislocating China*, 224.

174 Michael Clarke, “China’s ‘War on Terror’ in Xinjiang: Human Security and the Causes of Violent Uighur Separatism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20 (2008): 294.

sovereignty and human rights rather than in the name of religion.”<sup>175</sup> The reasons Uyghur detainees gave for being in Afghanistan in 2001 were almost unanimously because of Chinese government persecution and the desire to fight for independence, not to wage a jihad.<sup>176</sup>

### 3. Resonance with Personal Experiences

Having anger towards real or perceived immorality and believing that there is a war against Islam are not enough to radicalize an individual. Sageman argues that the jihadist viewpoint is internalized when the belief that there is a war against Islam also resonate with one’s everyday experiences.<sup>177</sup> Muslims facing discrimination, especially in the diaspora, can easily read inequality as being connected to a global war against Muslims. The “indisputable evidence in one’s own personal experience” serves as a powerful force to motivate young Muslims to join the fight.<sup>178</sup>

For the Uyghurs who believe that there is war against Islam, their personal experiences would most likely resonate with this belief. It would not be hard for a Uyghur to translate the government’s repressiveness, in particular regulations on religious activities, to confirm the belief that there is a war against Islam. Uyghurs facing discrimination can and do also interpret such inequality in the context of religious persecution, in line with Sageman’s assessment on the Muslim diaspora living in Europe. The Baren and Ghulja incidents discussed earlier are two examples of clashes with religious connections.

However, as stated in the above section, this thesis assesses that most Uyghurs do not see the conflict between Uyghurs and the Chinese government as a religious conflict. The fight is viewed more of a struggle for independence or greater autonomy. Because of this, many Uyghurs view the battle as against colonialism, rather than against an “evil”

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175 Gladney, “Responses to Chinese Rule,” 391.

176 Clarke, “China’s ‘War on Terror’,” 294.

177 Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 83.

178 Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 83.

and “depraved” Western culture that other Muslims commonly declare they are combating. The PRC does not fall so cleanly, or at all, into the characterization of a “depraved” Western society.

#### **4. Mobilized by Networks**

Sageman argues that the next step towards radicalization is to have people who are “further along the path of violence” to provide the guidance to these angry young Muslims.<sup>179</sup> This interaction often occurs through face-to-face groups or through online groups. According to Sageman, many individuals already have family members who are connected to terrorism, even before they have joined a terrorist organization.<sup>180</sup> Many join along with friends, often time childhood friends, but also friends they made through extremist Muslim student associations or mosques. Sageman asserts that “joining the global Islamist terrorism social movement was based to a great degree on friendship and kinship.”<sup>181</sup>

Uyghurs in Xinjiang have an extremely limited capacity to network face-to-face. Beyond the “everyday resistance” described earlier in Chapter IV, it is incredibly challenging for Uyghurs to gather together in significant-sized groups without raising the suspicion of Chinese officials. As demonstrated in the case of the Chinese government cracking down on the määräp, the PRC does not look favorably upon groups that it does not control.

As for networking through online groups, the internet is heavily censored in Xinjiang, as it is in the rest of China. As stated earlier, websites containing any information deemed by the government to be subversive are blocked, to include websites of Uyghur transnational organizations. Access to computers is also limited in some areas of Xinjiang, due to the remoteness and lack of modernization in some parts of the region. For these reasons, it is hard to believe that Uyghurs could be mobilized through online groups as Sageman asserts many disgruntled young Muslims are doing in Europe. As he

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<sup>179</sup> Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 84.

<sup>180</sup> Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 67.

<sup>181</sup> Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 66.

argues: “Without the Internet, a leaderless terrorist social movement would scatter all over the political space without any direction. The Internet makes the existence of a leaderless jihad possible.”<sup>182</sup> Uyghur expatriates involved in transnational organizations have obviously greater freedom for networking, particularly those living in democratic states, but nevertheless still face challenges in reaching Uyghurs back in Xinjiang.

Despite Chinese officials’ repeated claims that Uyghur “terrorists” in Xinjiang are linked with Al Qaeda and other international terrorist organizations, there is little reliable evidence to support this claim. For example, the Combatant Status Review Tribunals (CSRT) revealed that most of the 22 Uyghur detainees held in Guantanamo Bay had not heard of ETIM prior to being held in Guantanamo Bay and most had received little or no assistance from Al Qaeda or the Taliban.<sup>183</sup> Five of these detainees were released in 2006 and resettled in Albania, despite the PRC’s request for these men to be returned back to China.<sup>184</sup> By 2008, the United States conceded that all of the Uyghur detainees were “no longer enemy combatants” and therefore in need of countries to accept them upon release from prison.<sup>185</sup> Uyghur dissidents are not closely tied to Al Qaeda, as PRC officials claim.

## 5. Terrorists or Freedom Fighters?

How does the ethnic conflict in Xinjiang fit into Sageman’s theory on Islamic radicalization and terrorism? This thesis assesses that the situation in Xinjiang does not fit into Sageman’s theory on radicalization. The Uyghurs fulfill only one of the four dynamics of radicalization – moral outrage. Most Uyghurs do not feel that there is a war against Islam. Although their personal experiences may line up with the great moral injustices they witness, it is not in the context of a war against Islam. The anger and discontent that they feel is against what they perceive to be a foreign power imposing its repressive colonial influence, not against a great immoral civilization that is waging war

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182 Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad*, 144.

183 Clarke, “China’s ‘War on Terror’,” 294.

184 “Albania takes Guantanamo Uighurs,” *BBC News*, May 6, 2006, accessed July 23, 2012, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4979466.stm>.

185 “Exploring the Nature.”

against Islam. That is not to say that religion does not play a part in the conflict in Xinjiang. Many Uyghurs, secular or not, closely identify being a Muslim with being a Uyghur. The faith is closely connected to the culture. Therefore, repressive measures by the Chinese government are often viewed as a deliberate attempt to diminish or eliminate the Uyghur culture, to include its religious foundation. Nevertheless, Uyghurs are not compelled to respond with a jihad against the PRC. Lastly, Uyghurs are not mobilized by networks because the Chinese state, through various oppressive measures, simply does not allow this to happen.

At this time, Uyghurs are not consolidated as terrorists or even as freedom fighters. There is very little evidence of Islamic radicalization and mobilization in Xinjiang. The repressiveness of Chinese policies towards Uyghurs has not, or at least not yet, influenced Uyghurs to rally together and seek terrorism as a response. Although the Chinese government has blamed Xinjiang separatists for all the violent incidents in 1997 and 1998, no Uyghur groups or individuals have taken credit for these acts.<sup>186</sup> Very few of the confrontations since the 1990s can be definitively associated with Uyghur separatist or “terrorist” groups. In addition, further examination of these incidents brings the question of how “terrorist” acts are defined, and whether regular criminal acts are being defined as acts of terrorism. Lastly, there are no significant indications that there has been a call for a religious war against the Chinese – in fact, searches through the internet for calls on a jihad against the Chinese produces almost nothing.<sup>187</sup> The appeal for taking a radicalized and militant Islamic response has not been noteworthy.

Millward makes the interesting observation that in earlier Chinese reports and writings, words such as “East Turkistan” and “terrorist” were not commonly found, and instead words such as “national separatist” and “enemy” were used to describe those involved in conflicts in Xinjiang.<sup>188</sup> However, after the 9/11 terrorist attack in the United States, the PRC began to extensively use terrorism-related language, as evident in the often referenced 2002 report “‘East Turkistan’ Terrorist Forces Cannot Get Away with

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186 Gladney, “Responses to Chinese Rule,” 380.

187 Gladney, “Responses to Chinese Rule,” 391.

188 Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads*, 339.

Impunity.” The PRC received some international validation in its fight against global “terrorism” when the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, identified ETIM as a leading terrorist group in 2002. Interestingly, none of the incidents in the 1990s were ever claimed by a group calling itself the ETIM and the first mention of ETIM was not until 2000.<sup>189</sup> It appeared that few people had ever heard of the ETIM, to include the U.S. military, which in a 2001 report on Uyghur Muslim separatist not only did not mention the ETIM but also stated that there was “no single identifiable group” for the violent opposition in Xinjiang.<sup>190</sup> These observations reveal the Chinese government’s attempts to take advantage of the “global war on terrorism” to suppress Uyghur dissidents.

If the Chinese government continues to suppress the Uyghurs in the name of combating “separatism, extremism and terrorism,” is it possible that the PRC may be creating a self-fulfilling prophecy? Is it possible that if a state keeps treating a people like violent criminals with a radical religious bent that these people might actually become so? There are some concerns that Beijing’s harsh treatment of Uyghurs may eventually lead to radicalization. In 2012, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) stated in its annual report that: “China’s active repression of Uighur religion and culture may be counterproductive, leading to the very type of extremism Beijing’s policies are trying to forestall.”<sup>191</sup> The USCIRF Chair, Dr. Katrina Lantos-Swett, also argued that the Chinese government’s religious persecution against Uyghurs has “led neither to stability nor security” but instead was “fueling anger and resentment” and may potentially “trigger precisely the extremism that Beijing is claiming to combat.”<sup>192</sup>

Even though many Uyghurs do not believe that there is a war against Islam, it does not mean that they will not embrace such a view in the future. Nor does it mean that another world view cannot be created and embraced. There is already the belief amongst

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189 “Exploring the Nature.”

190 Gladney, “Responses to Chinese Rule,” 390.

191 “2012 Annual Report,” U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (2012): 6.

192 “USCIRF Urges China to End Restrictions and Violence during Ramadan,” U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, accessed August 1, 2012, <http://www.uscirf.gov/news-room/press-releases/3780-uscirf-urges-china-to-end-restrictions-and-violence-during-ramadan.html>.

some Uyghurs that the PRC is trying to commit cultural genocide on the Uyghurs. In the case of Chechnya, the secular nationalistic struggle became radicalized for many reasons. Islam became a force for mobilizing and inspiring people to the nationalistic struggle, especially under the charismatic leadership of Shamil Basaev.<sup>193</sup> Basaev's success in the battle for Grozny attracted young disgruntled and unemployed Chechens to become fighters.<sup>194</sup> There is the risk that if a future charismatic Uyghur leader emerges, he or she may utilize Islamic radicalization as a means to mobilize support in the fight for independence. The continued repressive policies of the CCP certainly give Uyghurs tangible reasons to oppose the regime. The appeal of radicalization may even be stronger if one believes that cultural genocide is happening. In that case, self-determination becomes, above all else, the most important objective because without it, the perceived end is annihilation. As Basaev so convincingly argues: "For me, it's first and foremost a struggle for freedom. If I'm not a free man, I can't live in my faith. I need to be a free man. Freedom is primary."<sup>195</sup> Islamic radicalization is one possible approach to achieving this freedom.

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<sup>193</sup> James Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007): 98.

<sup>194</sup> Hughes, *Chechnya*, 100.

<sup>195</sup> Hughes, *Chechnya*, 107.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this thesis is to answer the question of how the Chinese government's policies towards the Uyghurs in Xinjiang have influenced the political consolidation of the Uyghurs. Three aspects of this question were explored: Uyghur identity, interests, and Islamic mobilization. First, have Chinese policies helped to strengthen or weaken Uyghur identity? Are the policies working to integrate Uyghurs into the greater Han society or have they served to further alienate the group? Second, how have Chinese policies shaped Uyghur interests? Do the policies give Uyghurs the tangible conditions to unite together and focus on common grievances? Finally, is there any evidence of Islamic radicalization and mobilization of Uyghurs in Xinjiang? Has the repressiveness of Chinese policies towards Uyghurs in any way influenced Uyghurs to seek terrorism as a response?

This thesis assesses that the Chinese policies have served to unintentionally unify the Uyghurs in opposition against a common adversary. Despite the inherent challenges to consolidating Uyghur identity, Uyghurs have increasingly viewed themselves as part of the same family, history, and culture. The heavy-handed approach of the PRC has produced unintended consequences of solidifying Uyghur identity, elevating opposition leaders, and encouraging continued resistance, albeit mainly in the form of covert “everyday resistance” due to the overwhelming repressiveness of the state. With the core of Chinese policies being about changing the Uyghurs (or in the government’s term, to ‘develop’ them), Uyghurs have responded in stressing even more so their distinction from the Han Chinese people and culture. The Chinese polices in Xinjiang have not worked to integrate Uyghurs into Chinese society, but has only further alienated the group.

Despite the Uyghur identity solidifying as a direct response to Chinese persecution, the PRC’s overwhelming state capacity to repress Uyghur discontent has prevented the Uyghurs from achieving any significant form of political consolidation. The Chinese government’s strategy of specifically targeting protest and demonstration leaders and exacting severe sentences has been effective in serving as warnings to others and deterring would-be leaders. Stringent censorship of the internet and other means of

controlling information have presented significant challenges to any efforts to mobilize the people. The government has also been effective in discouraging fellow Turkic speaking peoples in Central Asia from offering support to the Uyghurs. Because of this, the heart of the transnational movement has shifted from Central Asia to the West, where significantly fewer Uyghurs live. Transnational groups also face challenges in achieving unity because the Uyghur diaspora, spread over different regions of the world, disagree on objectives, interests, tactics, and on who should have leadership. The split is generally between the diaspora living in Central Asian states, and the diaspora living in Western, democratized and industrialized states.

Finally, there is very little evidence of Islamic radicalization and mobilization in Xinjiang. The unfavorable Chinese policies towards Uyghurs have not, or at least not yet, influenced Uyghurs to rally together and seek terrorism as a response. The situation in Xinjiang does not fit Sageman's theory on Islamic radicalization. The Uyghurs only fulfill one of the four dynamics Sageman argues is necessary for radicalization – moral outrage. The strong terrorism rhetoric the PRC has used in describing Uyghur separatists can be attributed to the Chinese government's efforts to take advantage of the “global war on terrorism” to suppress Uyghur dissidents.

In conclusion, the PRC's policies in Xinjiang have increased Uyghur solidarity socially but not politically. Although there are occasional glimmers of hope for the Uyghurs found in the emergence of leaders such as Rabiyä Qadir, the overall situation in Xinjiang is not an optimistic one for the Uyghurs. Current PRC policies have only served to exacerbate ethnic tensions. If current PRC policies do not change, and Uyghurs become increasingly alienated, there is the potential for continued ethnic violence, perhaps on an even greater scale than previously seen. If Uyghurs increasingly believe there is no hope of surviving what many already perceive to be cultural genocide, the appeal to fight may be too powerful for many Uyghurs to resist. The combination of both Xinjiang's importance to the Chinese government and the sizeable presence of an ethnic-minority group dissatisfied with Han Chinese rule make this a problem that will not easily go away.

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